



Administrative Procedure 1225 and Guideline

SMUDGING FOR INDIGENOUS STAFF AND STUDENTS

Responsibility:	Superintendents, Student Achievement & Well-Being, Teaching and Learning and the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Department
Legal References:	Ontario Human Rights Code 1962, 2013 Canadian Human Rights Act Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Smoke Free Ontario Act, 2017 (sec 19)
Related References:	Policy 1017 - Human Rights Policy 1008 - Equity and Inclusion Policy 1012 - Religious and Creed Accommodations Administrative Procedure 1230 - Faith and Religious Accommodations Procedure 4230 -Open Flames Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed, Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2015
Effective:	October 2022
Revisions:	
Reviewed:	

1. Preamble

- 1.1 The Ontario Human Rights Code (Code), Canadian Human Rights Act, Canadian Constitution, Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples include legal protections for the fundamental right for Indigenous Peoples to freely practice spiritual traditions and to be treated equally and with dignity. One Indigenous Spiritual practice includes smudging ceremonies.
- 1.2 The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) commits to work with the community it serves to foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes acceptance, mutual respect and the protection of creed and religious freedom for all individuals.
- 1.3 Freedom of religion and creed is an individual right and a collective responsibility. In a diverse region such as Waterloo, it is important that the public school system acknowledges freedom of religion and provides protection from discrimination and harassment as described by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

2. Belief Statements

- 2.1 Learning is optimized in a safe, caring and inclusive environment. The Religious and Creed Accommodation Policy (1012) is a proactive effort to support academic achievement by eliminating discrimination and harassment related to creed. The process of accommodation and partnership with the community helps build an environment of mutual respect and understanding.

- 2.2 The WRDSB recognizes that the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and practices in schools plays a powerful role in supporting and engaging Indigenous staff, students and their families. We also acknowledge that in certain circumstances non-Indigenous students and staff come to us having been fully immersed in Indigenous culture (i.e. non-Indigenous children adopted by Indigenous people). Such students and staff may also request to engage in smudging at school.
- 2.3 Staff and students are entitled to equal treatment without discrimination based upon creed. The WRDSB Religious and Creed Accommodation Policy (P1012) establishes a commitment to the values of freedom of religion and creed, freedom from discriminatory behaviors based on religion and creed, and respect for diversity of belief in schools. This procedure is intended to accommodate smudging requests by students, staff and caregivers, and to increase awareness and sensitivity regarding the practice of smudging in schools.
- 2.4 Smudging is a common practice among many Indigenous people, and therefore, it is important for schools to accommodate those who wish to participate in this practice.
- 2.5 There is always the possibility of exceptions to the content outlined in this document. Any questions can be directed to the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 **Creed:** The Code does not define creed, but the courts and tribunals have often referred to religious beliefs and practices. Creed may also include non-religious belief systems that, like religion, substantially influence a person's identity, worldview and way of life. The following characteristics are relevant when considering if a belief system is a creed under the Code. A creed:
- Is sincerely, freely and deeply held
 - Is integrally linked to a person's identity, self-definition and fulfillment
 - Is a particular and comprehensive, overarching system of belief that governs one's conduct and practices
 - Addresses ultimate questions of human existence, including ideas about life, purpose, death, and the existence or non-existence of a Creator and/or a higher or different order of existence
 - Has some connection to an organization or community that professes a shared system of belief.
- 3.2 **Smudging:** Smudging is an Indigenous practice of burning of medicines that is meant to purify, cleanse, and protect physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual spaces and create harmony and balance. Medicines can include but are not limited to sage, sweet grass, cedar, and tobacco. This ceremony is practiced by many, but not all, Indigenous Peoples.
- 3.3 **Smudging Kit:** This kit will contain all of the necessary items required for a smudging ceremony and can be accessed by submitting a request through the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus. Instructions for use and Smudge Kit contents are outlined in sections 7 and 8 of this document.

4. Responsibility of Principals and Managers

- 4.1 All student or staff smudging requests should be made by the administrator of the school through the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus at which point the school will receive

Smudge Kit training and a Smudge Kit. It is imperative that staff and student(s) are informed of and familiar with these guidelines prior to the use of the kit. Some Indigenous practices may vary from these guidelines, so consultation is essential as it will ensure that each student or staff member has their say in this process. When a request for smudging is made by students or staff, a conversation regarding the request is required to ensure all parties fully understand the guidelines.

- 4.2 Principals and Managers are asked to identify a space where students and staff will be able to smudge. A review of the location of fire alarms and smoke detectors with the custodian or facilities staff is necessary. Fire alarms should not be a deterrent for smudging. Ideally, this space will be in a well ventilated area, and/or have access to a window that can open. Otherwise, the smudge kit contains a smoke absorber that will help with the dissipation of smoke.
- 4.3 For Student Smudge Kits, principals are asked to identify a staff team who will be trained to support and supervise students during smudging. Staff training about these procedures is required and will be provided by Indigenous Board staff.
- 4.4 Principals should provide general messaging to the entire school staff prior to the initial smudge kit use informing them about the kit and some considerations outlined in this procedure. It is important to respect the privacy of students/staff who are smudging, so those names should be kept as confidential as possible. There is not always a set time for when someone may want to smudge, so it can occur at any time throughout the day. It may not be possible to give advance notice for when a student or staff will want/need to smudge on any given day, so administrators may wish to send a general notice to staff. Here is a [sample general statement communication](#).
- 4.5 Reference to additional staff responsibilities can be found in section 8 of this document, *Smudge Kit Use*

5. Smudging Defined

- 5.1 Smudging is a traditional cultural practice to some First Nations and Métis people; today, some Inuit may have also adopted this practice. Indigenous students, regardless of cultural group, are invited to request the ability to smudge at school, provided that smudging is part of their cultural practice.

Indigenous people may use smudging as a method to cleanse their body, mind, and spirit. For some, smudging may be used as a 'reset' to return to a calm and balanced state. Four sacred medicines (cedar, sage, sweetgrass, tobacco) can be used alone or in combination in a smudge. When the medicine is ignited the smoke that is created is used to wash over an individual's body.

For a visual reference, please watch the video "How to smudge: Burning Sage", of Anishinaabe Knowledge Keeper Debra Courchene explaining her teachings on [smudging](#).

6. Supervision of Students

- 6.1 An agreement regarding supervision must be made through discussion between the student requesting the accommodation and the school. Staff do not need to be supervised.
- 6.2 It is not a staff person's responsibility to 'teach' Indigenous students how to smudge. Students should already be aware of their own personal smudging process and not require staff to show

them how to do it. In the case where students are unfamiliar with this practice and wish to learn, referrals for cultural support may be made to WRDSB's Indigenous School Social Worker following the standard Social Work referral process.

- 6.3 A team of staff members (typically 2-4 people) will be identified and trained to supervise students during the ceremony. Staff training from Indigenous Board staff will accompany the delivery of the Smudge Kit. Students who will be using the smudge kit will need to be aware of who each member of this team is.

7. Smudge Kits

[Smudge Kits](#) will be available to schools upon request and will contain all of the necessary items required for a smudging ceremony including:

- Silicone heat-proof mat
- Smoke absorber/fan
- Sage (medicine)
- Empty glass jar for sage ashes and used matches
- Smudging shell (Smudge bowl)
- Plastic water bottle
- Box of matches

Students may wish to use their own medicine, smudging shell, and/or a feather, which is acceptable; however, all of the other items in the Smudge Kit provided by the Board will be required each time a student smudges.

**Staff Smudge Kits do not come with medicine or a smudge shell. Those items are the staff member's responsibility.

8. Smudge Kit Use Guidelines

8.1 Setting up:

- Unpack the kit and ensure all contents are accounted for
- Ensure the water bottle is filled with water. This water is intended for emergencies only and should not be used to douse the smoldering medicine out. The water may be left in the water bottle and stored in the kit.
- Prepare the mason jar that is marked "ashes" to receive the remnants at the end of the ceremony by removing the lid

8.2 Smudging:

- Open sage container
- Place smudge shell on top of the silicone mat (*the only time the silicone mat may not be necessary is if smudging is done outside)
- Place 2-3 leaves of sage in the shell. ** If the student has their own medicine, they may use it. Note: sage can come in different forms (eg. sage stick and loose sage). Medicine other than sage may also be used
- Strike a match against the matchbox and light the medicine. Note: lighting medicine with a lighter is not considered respectful practice
- Extinguish the match and place it in the empty jar or along the inside of the shell
- Extinguish the flame of the burning medicine by waving your hand (or feather) rapidly over top of the flame until the medicine (sage) is left smoldering with some smoke rising from it (note: it is not respectful practice to blow the flame out)

- Proceed with smudging ceremony

8.3 Concluding and clean up (responsibility of the staff supervisor):

- Once smudging is complete, allow the smoldering medicine to burn out on its own. Never extinguish the medicine with water.
- Once the smudge is complete to the student's satisfaction, turn on the Smoke Absorber close to the smudge shell to clear the room of smoke. Leave the smoke absorber/fan running until you are satisfied that the room is clear of smoke (usually 5-10mins).
- When the shell has cooled, empty the remnants into the mason jar marked "ashes", and ensure that the lid is tightly closed. The jar can hold remnants until it is full. Once the jar is full, the contents (ashes from the smudge) can be respectfully placed outside at the base of a tree. Note: some families may have different disposal practices, which must be respected. Varying practices will be revealed during the initial consultation phase.
- **Store the matches in a secure location**

8.4 Student Smudge Kit Important Notes:

- This kit is to support Indigenous students who are familiar with and already practice smudging. This kit is not to be used as a teaching tool in the classroom. It is also not intended to introduce the practice of smudging to Indigenous students. . In certain circumstances students may engage with the Indigenous Social Worker who can introduce the practice and provide teachings.
- The practice of smudging is reserved for Indigenous students who have received smudging teachings from a parent, guardian, Indigenous Social Worker, knowledge keeper or Elder.
- Students should already be aware of their own personal smudging process and not require staff to show them how to do it. Non-Indigenous staff should be aware that it is not their role to teach students how to smudge.
- Indigenous students should be supervised, and assisted as necessary with logistics only by an adult at the school when engaging with this practice. Staff Assistance:
 - Young Indigenous children may be familiar with smudging, but are accustomed to having an adult assist them with the lighting of the medicine while older students may be comfortable lighting their smudge independently. All smudges in schools must have staff oversight (staff responsibilities outlined in 4.3 above).
 - Staff is responsible for lighting the match for students who are not confident enough to do so on their own. Consultation with the student will determine the student's comfort level in lighting the medicine on their own. Once the smudge is lit, staff are encouraged to allow the student as much privacy as possible during the ceremony.
- Students who have reviewed these instructions with a staff member may smudge with minimal supervision.
- Students should be introduced to each member of the 'staff team', so they are aware of who they can approach for assistance
- Access to the kit is not dependent on the student's behaviour (i.e. access cannot be used as a reward nor should it be denied if the student is having a 'bad day').
- A student may request to smudge at any time throughout the day. There are no set times.
- From the Ontario Human Rights Code: "Telling students to go outside to smudge, including in inclement weather conditions, may breach the school's duty to accommodate by not doing so in a way that respects students' dignity." Some students may request to smudge outside, and that would be acceptable.

- No part of the Smoke Free Ontario Act would prevent an Indigenous person from smudging nor from using tobacco for smudging or other ceremonial purposes.
- If a student invites staff to smudge alongside them, that would be acceptable; however, staff should not ask to participate. This is meant to be a student centered practice.
- Kit storage - The school's administrator(s) can decide the best place to store the kit. If there is a dedicated smudging space, the administrator may wish to keep the contents of the kit out and accessible for ease of use. It is important to keep the matches in a secure location at all times (i.e. matches should **never** be left out).
- The time it takes for a smudging ceremony can vary; however, as a general guideline, it should take approximately 5-10 minutes from start to finish.
- Kits will remain in the school provided it is being used by students. If there are no students requiring this support, contact the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus in the Indigenous Education Branch to arrange for the kit to be collected at your school or office location.
- All supplies contained in the kit upon delivery are intended for general usage, which may be used by multiple students in the same location/school. In circumstances where students bring their own items (i.e. medicine, shell, feather) to use, those items would be reserved for that specific student.
- Requests for additional sage for Smudge Kits can be made through the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus.

9. Competing Rights

- 9.1 Organizations and institutions operating in Ontario have a legal duty to take steps to prevent and respond to situations involving competing rights.

In dealing with competing rights claims, the Supreme Court of Canada has confirmed that there is no hierarchy of Charter rights. All have equal status and no right is more important than the others. Related to this is the principle that no right is absolute. Every right is inherently limited by the rights and freedom of others. Therefore, if rights do come into conflict, Charter principles require a “[reconciliation](#)” that fully respects the importance of both sets of rights so that each is realized to the greatest extent possible.

(Policy on preventing discrimination based on creed, Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2015, pg.73-74)

- 9.2 Complaints can be addressed through the [Human Rights Policy \(1017\)](#).

10. Community Consultations

- 10.1 Consultations with local Indigenous leaders were conducted and resulted in many revisions and details contained in this Administrative Procedure. More information about this consultation phase can be provided by the Equity and Inclusion Officer - Indigenous Focus.